

The Rats Have Figured It Out,

Civilization is mostly a misnomer - it seems the more of it that crowds into an area, the less "civil" it becomes. The scientific community proved this with rats several years ago discovering that as population density increases so do behaviors attributed to social ills. The more rats you put in a box the more irritable, aggressive and angry they become. In people terms, that translates into crime, traffic congestion, domestic violence, gangs - all that stuff we've supposedly elected politicians to handle. It seems that rats, like people, get real cranky over turf no matter how "affordable the low cost housing."

Now, I could have told the scientists that without a gazillion dollar government grant. Living things need enough resources and elbowroom to maintain a harmonious life. See, I said it faster, plus I wouldn't have charged much more than a can of Diet Pepsi and a Snickers bar for the insight. Of course, that would have left a lot of white-coated big brains milling around without having anything obvious to study. Also, the government would have to come up with more excuses for spending money that they shouldn't have collected from us in the first place. A properly applied Snickers bar can be a very powerful incentive; but they never call, they never write. They didn't ask me.

It used to be in this county that people would acknowledge one another as two vehicles passed on the back roads. The "rural wave," is usually an index finger raised from your steering hand, (or several fingers for the more exuberant). Sometimes it's a mere nod of the head. Whatever form it takes, there is a recognition of community, like a genuine smile or a "howdy neighbor." The wave is like rural shorthand for "life is tough but we are all in this together - glad you're onboard." Except the motion is not so wordy and much faster to do.

I've seen the "wave" in Oklahoma, Texas, and even Kansas. It is a commonality especially shared by folks who live close to the ground who are

But Not Elbert

regularly challenged by weather and other forces beyond their control. Two farmers crossing paths don't really need to "know" one another to "understand" the other. Life is hard and sometimes worse. The same ethic applies to ranchers, cowboys and others who don't have their lives conveniently piped in and problems solved by some great faceless municipality.

Too many folks are fleeing urban areas and moving here who think changing the channel manually rather than by remote is the stuff of great hardship. Self-reliance has shrunk down to a very small fraternity these days. Real cowboys do it manually. Surrounding oneself with shiny consumer goods and all the extravagance intrinsic to plastic separates you from real life. Too much convenience makes one lazy, unable to perform physical work or even to think through problems. It's also easy to get dependent on the luxury of conveniences and to become prone to believe that soap operas are in fact real. Hint: If your life essentially stops when the electricity goes off, you probably qualify as pathetically urban. Get out more. Ride a horse. Milk a cow.

The "rural wave" is a genuine expression of humanity that you can still see in small towns and throughout the rural west. But, best you look quick

and don't blink because the wave is fading fast. You won't see it in downtown Denver, Aurora or other enclaves of polyester and speed bumps. A single digit salute of an altogether different nature is practiced there and "howdy neighbor" has little to do with the gesture. We are rapidly outgrowing rural America and losing the very essence of it to the mindset of bigger is better.

Growth is like a weed on steroids -- it exists for the sole purpose of replicating itself while making a select group of folks rich. If you don't belong to the group, beware of the weed. Soon you won't have to go into Denver

for your occasional dose of rudeness, congestion, and noise. Some rich guys are going to save you the drive and import right here it for you.

Greed and power are eternal. Developers and politicians can always be counted on to work at throwing more and more bodies into "the rat box." How many will "fit" before real problems start showing up around here is yet to be seen but you don't need a white coat and a Ph.D. to figure out who the rats are. For those who extol "you can't stop progress," have you spent the 20-30 minutes getting through the main drag of Parker lately? Before it mutated into "Aurora South" the same drive through Parker took 2 minutes maximum and that was going the speed limit with a cop on your bumper.

This week, take a stopwatch and time how long it takes to pass through Elizabeth. In the next year or so you will be able to multiply that duration by a factor of 3. Traffic no big deal for you? More traffic means more accidents, more parking problems and more time added to your beloved commute. More taxes for police and road improvements.

Vehicles moving slowly through town operate less efficiently and therefore spew forth more exhaust to "perfume the air and enhance the quality of country life." A fast moving bypass around town is cost prohibitive. Widening the existing road eliminates parking. When faced with two evils you still have to choose. Now, that is just the traffic problem, there are many other quandaries that unchecked growth will bring. Not planning today won't stop the future from arriving, it just means having much fewer options available to you when the future is today. Unfortunately, growth cannot just be stopped.

I bet a Snickers bar that developers don't care; after the sawdust settles they won't be living here anyway. So what if the water table can't support the population (can you say Tucson?) or that traffic on I-86 rivals LA? Not their problem. Their job is to build and unload property fast, and then move down the road to suck the resources out of greener pastures. This

doesn't necessarily make developers wicked evildoers. It's their job. If they do it cheap, quick, and keep the local static down, they make money. Lots of it.

Oddly, local voters never seem to notice that they, not the developers get saddled with the long-term taxes left in the wake of growth. Politicians aren't about to remind the locals about that either. Douglas County experienced choking growth, sucked in obscene amounts of revenue and still raised taxes to ridiculous levels to support all the new services it has to provide. If you think Elbert County is too wise to repeat the process, you are apparently ill versed in history or have a mighty powerful fantasy life.

Of course government will "need" more taxes to deal with the problems that poorly planned growth has wrought. Short-term gains (jobs) and promised tax base projections are really temporary smoke and mirrors - as believable as a campaign promise. Its short-term - the advantages don't last. Like two cowpokes waving on a dusty road "the glories of growth" will be an unsustainable memory.

In the early '60s, smiley faces would appear spontaneously on dusty vans and around various places young people congregated. They were hand drawn icons of benevolence left by passersby to be discovered later by others; a kind of latter day "Kilroy was here." Freeform goodwill. Eventually the suits of Madison Avenue caught the scent for profit potential and started to churn out yellow plastic coated happy face stickers. Happy faces flooded the market and showed up everywhere until consumers could hardly stand them. Happy face toilet paper pretty much killed whatever sentiment and humanity lingered from the original intent. No doubt Elbert's "rural wave" is on its way to extinction. You see it less and less now, although it probably will go through the fake plastic smiley stage before it finally passes on. I've already seen urban transplants waving as their sport cars zip down the road. It is a hollow gesture, imitating understanding. I'm already homesick for the "real thing."

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<http://abe21.net/StateOfWave.html> 11/15/08